

Carousel Brainstorming Activating Strategy
“The Fall of the House of Usher”
Gothic Literature

While carousel brainstorming, students will rotate around the classroom in small groups, stopping at various stations for a designated amount of time discussing the question posted at that station. While at each station, students will activate their prior knowledge on gothic literature through conversation with their peers. This activity is modified from a traditional carousel activity, so feel free to adapt it again to best fit your preferences.

Directions:

1. Post the question sheets around your classroom. I have provided 10 questions, but you can use less depending on your class size. Write the number station at the top of each sheet.
2. Divide your students into groups of 3-4. Direct each group to stand in front of a home-base question station. Give each group one worksheet to record all of their responses. Either designate one person to be the group recorder or advise students to switch recorders at each station.
3. Tell your students the expectations. Inform groups that they will have a certain number of minutes to brainstorm and write ideas at each question station depending on how long you want this activity to take. I think 2 minutes is sufficient. When time is called, groups will rotate to the next station in clockwise order. Students will record their responses on their group worksheet. They will bring their worksheet with them as they go.
4. Once students are finished at their last station, take some time to have groups share one or two ideas out loud with the entire class.

Brainstorming Questions:

1. What is gothic literature?
2. What kind of supernatural elements are used in gothic literature?
3. What types of protagonists are typical in gothic literature?
4. What types of villains are present in gothic literature?
5. Why do gothic writers use madness/insanity as a topic?
6. What clichés are in gothic literature?
7. What type of mood or setting should a gothic story entail?
8. Why is gothic literature such a popular genre?
9. How does science play a role in gothic literature?
10. Are some children too young to read gothic literature?

Group Members:
Brainstorm Activity – Gothic Literature

Station #	Answers/Ideas
Station 1	
Station 2	
Station 3	
Station 4	
Station 5	
Station 6	
Station 7	
Station 8	
Station 9	
Station 10	

Name:

Date:

Vocabulary
“The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe

Vocabulary Word	Part of Speech	Definition
melancholy	noun	
insufferable	adjective	
pervaded	verb	
malady	noun	
goad	verb	
precipitous	adjective	
sojourn	noun	
importunate	adjective	
phantasmagoric	adjective	

countenance	noun	
trepidation	noun	
ennuye	adjective	
abhorrence	noun	
cataleptical	adjective	
futility	noun	
tempest	noun	
miasma	noun	
uncouth	adjective	
doughty	adjective	
aghast	adjective	

Vocabulary Answers

“The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe

Vocabulary Word	Part of Speech	Definition
melancholy	noun	a feeling of sadness, typically with no obvious cause
insufferable	adjective	too extreme to bear
pervaded	verb	to be present and apparent throughout
malady	noun	a disease or ailment
goad	verb	to provoke or someone so as to stimulate some action
precipitous	adjective	describes dangerously high or steep
sojourn	noun	a temporary stay
importunate	adjective	persistent; annoying
phantasmagoric	adjective	describes wild, shifting images, illusions
countenance	noun	a person's face or facial expression
trepidation	noun	a feeling of fear or agitation; sometimes trembling
ennuye	adjective	weary in spirits; emotionally exhausted
abhorrence	noun	a feeling of repulsion; disgusted loathing.
cataleptical	adjective	describes a condition characterized by lack of response to external stimuli and by muscular rigidity, so that the limbs remain in whatever position they are placed
futility	noun	pointlessness
tempest	noun	a violent, windy storm
miasma	noun	a very unpleasant or unhealthy smell
uncouth	adjective	lacking sophistication or delicacy
doughty	adjective	brave and persistent
aghast	adjective	filled with horror or shock

Name:

Date:

Reading Questions
"The Fall of the House of Usher" by Edgar Allan Poe

1. What is the setting? How does it affect the mood?

2. How does the narrator feel when he looks at the House of Usher?

3. Who owns the House of Usher? How is he/she affiliated with the narrator?

4. What do you know about Roderick?

5. What is unusual about the Usher family heritage?

6. What was the room like where the narrator was staying? What effect does it have on the story?

7. What is Roderick's condition when the narrator sees him for the first time?

8. Who is Madeline? What is her condition?

9. How does the narrator try to help Roderick's state of mind?

10. Roderick isn't afraid of death or pain. What is he afraid of?

11. What is the significance of Roderick's poem "The Haunted Palace"?

12. What does Roderick believe about the house?

13. What happens to Madeline? How does Roderick handle it?

14. What does the narrator learn about Roderick and Madeline's relationship? Why is it significant?

15. What is ironic about Madeline's blush cheeks?

16. How does Roderick change after his sister's death?

17. What strange thing occurs when they read "Mad Trist" of Sir Launcelot Canning?

18. What do Roderick and the narrator see when the doors swing open?

19. When Madeline collapses into Roderick's arms, what happens to Roderick?

20. What happens to the house of Usher? Why does this occur?

21. What is the double meaning of the title?

22. What does the zig zag crack in the house symbolize?

23. What detail foreshadows Madeline will return from the dead?

24. What detail foreshadows the house's collapse?

25. In what ways is the narrator enigmatic?

26. What details in the story are left unresolved or unexplained in the story?

Answer Key

"The Fall of the House of Usher" by Edgar Allan Poe

1. What is the setting? How does it affect the mood?

It is Autumn in the country. The narrator has just arrived at his friend's huge mansion which he describes as gloomy with gothic architecture. The clouds are hung "oppressively low." The imagery used here creates a solemn, dreary, and ominous mood. The narrator speaks of the moldy exterior and the bleak walls to describe the castle which is decaying.

2. How does the narrator feel when he looks at the House of Usher?

The narrator feels "insufferable gloom," depression, and a sickening of the heart intensifying the eerie atmosphere. It gives readers and the narrator an unsettling feeling.

3. Who owns the House of Usher? How is he/she affiliated with the narrator?

Roderick Usher owns the house; it is his family's. Roderick was the narrator's friend from childhood.

4. What do you know about Roderick?

Roderick is ill and requested the narrator come see him. He is a reserved person and keeps his composure about him. He is unwell; his mental health is breaking down; he has an overly sharp, acuteness of the senses. He is sensitive to light and taste, etc. Roderick is also generous and gives money to charity; he is passionately devoted to the arts and music.

5. What is unusual about the Usher family heritage?

Only one member of the Usher family has survived from generation to generation, thereby forming a direct line of descent without any outside branches. This implies that his family is made up of incestual relationships. Additionally, the Usher family has become so identified with its estate that people often confuse the inhabitants with their home.

6. What was the room like where the narrator was staying? What effect does it have on the story?

The room was large and lofty. It was filled with extravagant, antiquated furniture that was uncomfortable. There was little to no light inside; the light that managed to make it through the windows was not able to reach all the corners of the chamber. These details help create a dark, uneasy, and isolated atmosphere.

7. What is Roderick's condition when the narrator sees him for the first time?

He has a cadaverous complexion meaning he looks almost dead; he's pale, sickly, and his hair is thinning and "floating."

8. Who is Madeline? What is her condition?

She is Roderick's sister and last living relative. She suffers from a serious illness that doesn't allow her to move and she cannot completely control her limbs—something similar to catalepsy. On the evening the narrator arrives, Madeline succumbs to her disease and becomes bed-ridden.

9. How does the narrator try to help Roderick's state of mind?

The narrator tries to cheer him up by reading and painting together; he listened to Roderick play guitar and kept him company.

10. Roderick isn't afraid of death or pain. What is he afraid of?

Roderick says he is afraid of "fear."

11. What is the significance of Roderick's poem "The Haunted Palace"?

Roderick sings the poem to his friend, the narrator, introducing it as a half-remembered, ancient melody about the state of his house. It starts off very peaceful and describes a palace where angels and seraphs would be happy to stay. Then evil befalls on this house and the only visitors are frightened travelers. The poem symbolizes the same circumstances that the house of Usher is facing: the home and inhabitants face mental and physical decline.

12. What does Roderick believe about the house?

He believes that it has a will and can influence him; he believes it is responsible for his deteriorating mental health.

13. What happens to Madeline? How does Roderick handle it?

The doctor pronounces her dead and Roderick is devastated. Roderick wants to bury her under the house because he did not want the doctors discovering Madeline's body and investigating what her mysterious illness was.

14. What does the narrator learn about Roderick and Madeline's relationship? Why is it significant?

He looks at her corpse and notices how much the two siblings look alike. He realizes that they are twins. Twins are known to be able to sense things about each other which explains their otherworldly bond.

15. What is ironic about Madeline's blush cheeks?

Madeline appears to no longer look sick. She looks blush in her face (rosy cheeks). It is ironic because she looks more alive now that she is dead.

16. How does Roderick change after his sister's death?

Roderick looks even more ghastly pale after his sister's death. The light in his eye was gone and he started acting even more unusual. His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten. His medical/mental condition became worse.

17. What strange thing occurs when they read "Mad Trist" of Sir Launcelot Canning?

All the noises from the story are coming to life below the mansion. As they read the story aloud, they hear the details occurring in real life.

18. What do Roderick and the narrator see when the doors swing open?

The two men see Madeline, back from the dead, out of her chamber. There was blood upon her white robe. Signs of a struggle was evident—probably from escaping her tomb.

19. When Madeline collapses into Roderick's arms, what happens to Roderick?

He dies with her.

20. What happens to the house of Usher? Why does this occur?

The house cracks in two and sinks into the murky depths of the water. When both Roderick and Madeline die at the end of the story and the house falls into the lake, the house breaking part ends the House of Usher forever. The house of Usher represents both the lineage of the Usher family, so once the two heirs are dead, the house falls too.

21. What is the double meaning of the title?

- 1: The Usher family falls: perishes, dies, and ceases to exist. There are no other heirs.
- 2: The literal structure of the house itself falls, crumbles, and disappears.

22. What did the zig zag crack in the house symbolize?

The crack in the house and other details of physical deterioration of the house symbolize the physical and mental deterioration of the Roderick and Madeline.

23. What detail foreshadows Madeline will return from the dead?

Madeline's rise from the dead is foreshadowed by the narrator's comment that the first time he saw Madeline was the last "at least while living" time he would see her. This hints to readers that he would see her again, but dead.

24. What detail foreshadows the house's collapse?

Multiple answers:

1. The title foreshadows that the house will fall.
2. Additionally, the house was in decrepit condition.
3. "The Haunted Palace" is a poem about the doom of a king and his palace which foreshadows Roderick's downfall.
4. Roderick believes his house is haunted.

25. In what ways is the narrator enigmatic?

The narrator only exists in relation to the Ushers; he has no needs or personal aspirations. He is an outsider in the Usher home. He also doesn't have any dominant characteristics. He's observant and fearful, but he's not proactive enough to escape the creepy house he's been "trapped" in. He doesn't really partake in the story, and readers don't know his motives.

26. What details in the story are left unresolved or unexplained in the story?

Answer will vary.

Why does Roderick ask the narrator to come stay there?

Why doesn't the narrator just leave when he is obviously afraid?

Is Madeline really back from the dead? Is she a ghost?

Was Madeline actually buried alive?

Is Madeline's ghost back to take vengeance on her brother for intentionally burying her alive?

Could it be that Madeline and Roderick are really two halves of the same person, and so one cannot live without the other?

Name:

Date:

“The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe
Gothic Elements and Motifs

Complete the following chart using textual evidence. An example has been done for you.

Gothic Element	Quote from Text	Explanation
foreshadowing	I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR.	Roderick says he is afraid of “fear” and then he ultimately dies of fear.
a haunted or creepy house		
dreary landscape		
mysterious sickness		
inclement weather		
isolation		
buried alive		

supernatural		
doubling or doppelgänger		
resurrection		
suspense or fear		
darkness		
death		
blood		
madness		

Answer Key
Answers Will Vary (Multiple Correct Responses)

"The Fall of the House of Usher" by Edgar Allan Poe
Gothic Elements and Motifs

Gothic Element	Quote from Text	Explanation
foreshadowing	I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR.	Roderick says he is afraid of "fear" and then he ultimately dies of fear.
a haunted or creepy house	The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones.	The house of Usher was deteriorating and falling apart which was symbolic of the mental and physical health of Roderick and Madeline.
dreary landscape	I looked upon the scene before me --upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain --upon the bleak walls --upon the vacant eye-like windows -- upon a few rank sedges --and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees --with an utter depression of soul...	The landscape foreshadows something sinister will occur as the narrator feels uneasy and gloom when he looks at the house. The outside setting achieves a dark and threatening mood.
mysterious sickness	The disease of the lady Madeline had long baffled the skill of her physicians. A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character, were the unusual diagnosis.	Madeline's physical illness did not make sense to doctors; she struggled with moving her limbs; her limbs remain in whatever position they are placed. This creates a spooky, inexplicable plot line.
inclement weather	The impetuous fury of the entering gust nearly lifted us from our feet. It was, indeed, a tempestuous yet sternly beautiful night, and one wildly singular in its terror and its beauty. A whirlwind had apparently collected its force in our vicinity; for there were frequent and violent alterations in the direction of the wind...	The violent storm comes the night that Madeline returns from the dead. This build suspense and enhances the fear for readers. Readers suspect something horrifying will occur on this night.
isolation	The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within.	This description of the narrator's chambers emphasizes the anxiety and isolation he faces while staying at the house. He is all alone and confined.
buried alive	The body having been encoffined, we two alone bore it to its rest. The vault in which we placed it (and which had been so long unopened that our torches, half smothered in its oppressive atmosphere, gave us little opportunity for investigation) was small, damp, and entirely without means of admission for light...	Roderick and the narrator entomb Madeline in the vault under the house because they believe she is dead. She then returns a week later.

supernatural	A striking similitude between the brother and sister now first arrested my attention; and Usher, divining, perhaps, my thoughts, murmured out some few words from which I learned that the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them.	These lines imply that there is a deeper connection between Madeline and Roderick. Somehow, they are linked because they are twins.
doubling or doppelgänger	I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down—but with a shudder even more thrilling than before—upon the remodelled and inverted images of the grey sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows.	The reflection of the house is the first instance of doubling that occurs in the text. It scares the narrator when he looks down to see the house's reflection upside down. It foreshadows more doubling to come.
resurrection	For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold, then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated.	Madeline comes back to life (or she is a figment of their imagination). Nonetheless, she scares the two characters: one to death and one to flee the house.
suspense or fear	While he spoke, the lady Madeline (for so was she called) passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared. I regarded her with an utter astonishment not unmingled with dread—and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings. A sensation of stupor oppressed me, as my eyes followed her retreating steps.	The narrator is terrified when he sees Madeline pass by—her condition is getting worse and worse. It is the only time he ever sees her alive. This scene foreshadows her return postmortem and builds suspense toward her death.
darkness	I uplifted myself upon the pillows, and, peering earnestly within the intense darkness of the chamber, hearkened --I know not why, except that an instinctive spirit prompted me.	The entire house is dark because of Roderick's sensitivity ailment which makes the story much scarier.
death	"Her decease," he said, with a bitterness which I can never forget, would leave him (him the hopeless and the frail) the last of the ancient race of the Ushers.	Madeline's death was the beginning of the end for Roderick. When she died, he started to look more frail and deathly. Part of him died.
blood	...there DID stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher. There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame.	When Madeline returned from the tomb, she was covered in blood and bruises to imply that she had escaped and clawed her way out of the coffin.
madness	The writer spoke of acute bodily illness--of a mental disorder which oppressed him.	Roderick suffers from a mental illness which makes him uneasy; his fear is what kills him. Madness is his demise.

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**WHAT KIND OF
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WHAT TYPES OF
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